

# Nashville District

## Human Resources Newsletter

### "News You Can Use"

Issue 01-08-03  
1 August 2003

The purpose of this newsletter is to keep Nashville District employees informed about personnel issues, concerns, and topics. You are encouraged to review the information and disseminate to your organization. If there are particular areas of interest that you would like to see addressed in future issues, an article of general interest, or general comments, please contact John Restey at 615-736-5538 or [John.G.Restey@lrn02.usace.army.mil](mailto:John.G.Restey@lrn02.usace.army.mil).

## General News:

### Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA)

DoD employees (including Department of the Army) who enrolled in the FSA open season will have their first deductions withheld during the pay period ending September 20, 2003 and will see their first FSA deductions reflected on the October 2, 2003, Leave and Earnings Statement. Employees wanting to participate in a FSA during calendar year 2003 must have enrolled by June 27, 2003. A second open season for FSA enrollments will be held concurrently with the regular Federal Employee's Health Benefits program open season this fall (the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has not yet announced the specific dates). Enrollment elections made during the fall open season will be effective the first full pay period in January 2004.

Enrollments were delayed during the first FSA open season while OPM considered whether agencies had the authority to pay the negotiated administrative fees on behalf of their employees. On June 13, 2003, OPM sent a memorandum to heads of departments and agencies advising that OPM and the Office of Management and Budget have concluded that agencies may pay FSA administrative fees for employees. At this time, the DoD Civilian Personnel Management Service and the Office of the Secretary of Defense Comptroller are reviewing this issue and will provide notification when a final decision is made.

Employees who have FSA questions should contact the Third Party Administrator, SHPS, (Sykes Health Plan Services) at 1-877-FSAFEDS, or visit the web site, <http://www.FSAFEDS.com>.

## **What Makes a Good Labor Management Relations Environment?**

The Nashville District has enjoyed many years of a cooperative and healthy labor relations environment. One of the key reasons for this great success is the open and honest communication between management and the union. The principles of bargaining on the interest and merits of issues and of the parties involved as opposed to negotiating from a rigid bottom line position is critical and forms the basis for our labor relations environment. The attached chart points out the differences between soft, hard and principled negotiations. Once you look over this chart you'll have a better understanding as to why bargaining on principle is the way to go and why we enjoy a spirit of cooperation in the Nashville District. You may find this chart useful in your own personal negotiation strategy!



Labor Management  
Cooperation.d...

## **Shades of Green at Disney World Delays Reopening**

American Forces Press Service reports that the refurbished Armed Forces Recreation Center Shades of Green on Walt Disney World Resort won't open till March 1, 2004, instead of the originally planned Dec. 15, 2003, date. Guests who already hold reservations are offered three options: 1) Keep the same vacation dates for 2004 at the same room rates guaranteed in 2003. 2) Keep their vacation dates for 2003 at a comparable Disney Resort at the same room rates plus the applicable state tax of 11 percent. 3) Cancel the existing reservation and receive a full refund. Rates are computed on a sliding scale based on rank/grade. The Armed Forces Recreation Center is open to DoD ID-card holders in all branches of military service: active duty and reserve components, DoD civilians, both military and civilian DoD retirees, and their families. For more information, visit <http://www.shadesofgreen.org> or call toll free 1-888-593- 2242. For more on military travel options and discounts, see <http://www.military.com/eCommerce/DealIndex/> TAKEN FROM MIL.COM

## **Promotional Benefits Received by Conference Planners**

Everyone probably knows by now that employees may keep frequent flyer miles and hotel chain bonus points earned on official travel. Employees may retain those benefits for personal use, including upgrade to a higher class while on official travel. The rule is not the same for promotional benefits or materials received from a travel service provider in connection

with planning or scheduling an official conference or group travel. The General Services Administration has clarified this rule in a revision to the Federal Travel Regulation (41 CFR Parts 301-53 and 301-74, 68 FR 27936, 22 May 2003). Those benefits and materials are considered government property. They may be accepted only on behalf of the Federal Government and may be used only for official Government business. So, for you conference planners and contracting officers, when a hotel gives you 50,000 reward points for booking a conference with it, you may not keep them. The points belong to the Federal Government. If you have any questions about this regulation or any other ethics matters contact your legal department. **TAKEN FROM NECPOC HRD NEWSLETTER-JULY**

## **How to Find a Request for Personnel Action (RPA)**

**Searching for Closed RPAs:** Due to the large number of RPAs on the Central Site, ART RPA Tracker **will no longer allow** for searches of "closed," "cancelled," or "all" RPAs. Alternatives are:

- \* If you know the employee name on the RPA, use the ART [NPA Tracker tool](#) to locate the RPA.
- \* Use ART [RPA Tracker](#). Select "Search for RPAs that are Open" and "Pipeline Status: Pipelined."
- \* If this search fails to return a response, [check the crosswalk of pipelined actions](#) to ensure old RPA number is listed. (RPAs that were not in CPOC or CPAC inboxes upon M2M were not pipelined.)
- \* For non-pipelined RPAs, use DCPDS query capability. The CPOCMA Job Aid "Inbox Management" contains complete instructions on querying for closed RPAs. You may query for all closed RPAs that have been through your inbox; or for a specific RPA number, organization, or type of action.

## **Health and Benefits:**

### **Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) Catch-Up Contributions Update**

TSP catch-up contributions are additional tax-deferred contributions available to TSP participants age 50 or older who are already contributing either the maximum TSP contribution amount allowed or a dollar amount to any qualified plan which will result in

reaching the IRS elective deferral limit by the end of the year. In order to qualify, employees must be in a pay status, and must not be in the 6-month non-contribution period after receiving a financial hardship in-service withdrawal. The annual elective deferral limit for regular TSP contributions is \$12,000 for 2003. Catch-up contributions are limited to \$2,000 for 2003.

Beginning August 24, 2003, eligible Department of the Army civilian employees may make TSP catch-up contribution elections electronically via the Employee Benefits Information System (EBIS) web application at <https://www.abc.army.mil/> or the Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) automated telephone system at 1-877-276-9287 (see the [ABC-C Telephone Menu](https://www.abc.army.mil/Information/ABCGeneral/Information/ABCMenu.htm) <https://www.abc.army.mil/Information/ABCGeneral/Information/ABCMenu.htm> on the Army Benefits Center - Civilian (ABC-C) web site for outside the continental United States phone numbers). Hard copy enrollment forms will not be accepted. The Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) and the DoD payroll system will begin processing catch-up contribution deductions beginning September 7, 2003.

***Publicity from the Thrift Investment Board and several non-official publications have indicated elections to contribute could be submitted as early as July 2003 with August effective dates.*** However, for all Federal agencies, implementation of this program is dependent upon adaptation of personnel and payroll systems to allow for deduction of catch-up contributions. The automated enrollment systems EBIS and IVRS could not be turned on to accept these elections until the systems were updated to allow data to flow through the Defense Civilian Personnel Data System to DFAS.

The ABC-C web site at <https://www.abc.army.mil/> provides a "Hot" item with links to Q&A's and detailed information about TSP catch-up contributions.

The delay in implementing the program does not affect the maximum contribution amount of \$2,000 for 2003. Eligible employees considering participation in this new benefit are encouraged to start thinking about the amount to have withheld each pay date if they intend to contribute the maximum \$2,000 in 2003. An example of how to arrive at that amount, as well as other useful information, can be found under "TSP Catch-Up Contributions" at <https://www.abc.army.mil/>. <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/dpc/best/tsp-page.htm> ABC-C Counselors are available at 1-877-276-9287 to answer questions regarding TSP catch-up contributions.

## **Leave Year Review**

Employees, you need to take inventory now for the scheduling of your "use or lose" annual leave so that leave will not be forfeited at the end of the leave year. The leave year will end on the day immediately before the first day of the first full biweekly pay period in the new calendar year. For 2004, the first full biweekly pay period begins on January 11, 2004. Employees may carry over to the next leave year a maximum amount of accrued annual leave (240 hours for most employees). "Use or lose" annual leave is

the amount of accrued annual leave that is in excess of the employee's maximum annual leave limitation for carry over unto the next leave year or they will "lose" (forfeit) it. An agency may consider restoring annual leave that was forfeited due to an exigency of the public business or sickness of the employee only if the annual leave was scheduled in writing before the start of the third biweekly pay period prior to the end of the leave year.

#### **ACCURAL RATES**

<u>Employee Types</u>	<u>Less than 3 yrs svc</u>	<u>3 yrs but less than 15 yrs svc</u>	<u>15 or more yr svc</u>
Full-time	4 hrs per pp	6 hrs per pp (except 1 ¼ hrs in Last pay period)	8 hrs per pp
Part-time	1 hr AL for each 20 hrs in a pay status	1 hr AL for each 13 hrs in a pay status	1 hr AL for each 10 hrs in pay status.

Talk with your manager about scheduling your leave.

### **Food For Thought:**

Remember the three R's: Respect for self; Respect for others; and Responsibility for all your actions.